

Statement by  
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Souther California Farmers' Association Camp  
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This camp was originally built during the 1930's. It was built by the Federal government as a C.C.C. camp. In 1942 they began using it as a farm labor camp and they had some Braceros in here under the World War 2 program. ~~They~~ Then they had prisoners-of-war, mostly Itlaians, they all wanted to stay in this country, by the way. Then after the war they had displaced persons from Estonia, they were in family groups and they included college teachers and other professional people, so naturally they didn't want to stay in farm work. Then, they tried bringing in som American Indians and that didn't work out too well either, because the braves would just sit in camp all day and make the squaws go out and do the work and the squaws were loaded down with so many petticoats that they weren't able to get up and down the ladders very well. Then after that, they had more braceros and they had more trouble. The men were all the time getting into fights with the locals. Shortly before I arrived thirteen of the men from camp were badly beaten up in Cucamong and two were stabbed to death. The Consul in San Bernardino at the time was a man named Uria and he was at his wits' end. I came here on April 21, 1952, and on April 26 they closed down the camp. Uria took all our men away from us.

I'll tell you a little about my own background. I was born and raised in Santa Monica where many of my friends were Mexicans. I took four years of Spanish in high school. Then I went up to the University of California in Berkeley, I had another year of Spanish and majored in Commerce, graduated in 1927. I had a number of jobs in the foreign trade field, then in the late 40's I wnet down to Texas where my brother-in-law had 26 sections of land and I helped him clear it and I took over 750 acres on my own and put it into cotton. All of our help naturally was Spanish speaking, so I



brushed up on my Spanish a great deal in two years there. Things weren't going too well so I came out here in February of '52, thinking I would get me some land up in the San Joaquin Valley and continue growing cotton, but it was the wrong time of year; so I laid over here in Southern California and one day just happened to drop into the State Building in Los Angeles where I thought I would talk to the Department of Employment people about the bracero program which I was curious about. A little Irishman named Cap Cunningham was in charge of the farm placement service at the time and when I told him about my background, he said, "You're not going up to the San Joaquin Valley, I have got just the job for you right here," it seems that an association up near Santa Barbara needed a manager, so ~~he~~ ~~said~~ I went up there; but the position had just been filled. I came back and Cap Cunningham said, "It's a damn lucky thing, because I have got an even better job lined up for you. You go out to Cucamong and talk to the Board of Directors ~~at~~ there," so I did and they hired me on the spot. I said to my wife at the time, "this is a little too good to be true," Well, as it turned out, of course, the reason they were so eager was because they had been having all this trouble. The previous manager had been at sword points with the Consul and had resigned under fire.

Well, after they took our men away for three or four months or more, I knocked myself out trying to get reinstated. I took Uria out to lunch, and dinner and bought him drinks and reasoned with him and swore to him I would be personally responsible for my men and so forth and so on. I went to the sheriff in San Bernardino and got him to promise that he would provide more protection in the Cucamonga area. I went to various leading citizens of Cucamonga and pointed out to them that they were cutting their own throats, that it was definitely in the best interests of the community to have the nationals here. I worked on every angle I could think of. My Board of Directors finally voted a \$1,000 for me to go down to Mexico City



and talk with Señor Calderon, who was in overall charge of the national program, but darn it I never got to go, because just then we got reinstated. This was in August, 1952, since then we've gotten along pretty well. Oh, sure every once in a while there will be a scrape in town, but we have improved things ~~one~~ thousand per cent. Our basic secret is that we treat our men with respect, there may be another word for what I mean, but that's the best that I can think of. We try to be one big happy family here. The door of my ovvice is always open and the men not only can, but do come in with their problems; financial problems; family problems; all sorts of things. Not too long ago a fellow came in with a face a mile long and said he just had to get back to Mexico "Muy pronto.", someone in his family was sick or something of the sort. There wasn't time for us to go through the furlough machinery and he was a bit short of cash at the time, so I loaned him a couple of hundred bucks from my own pocket; he was back in a month or so and paid me, of course. I was never worried.

As far as relations with the locals are concerned. We operate on a different basis in this association from most of the others. We've got twelve local families living right here in the camp. I would estimate that 50% ov all the crews that we send out are mixed, that is, part national and part local. They get along very well together, I am told. Although every once in a while one of the crew leaders will give another one his locals and take the other one's nationals after they get out into the orchards. We alos have locals and nationals working side by side in the mess-hall. It is true that we would prefer to have all nationals because the locals sometimes get drunk and don't show up for work; but, the Department of Labor is putting the screws on us to use all locals in our kitchen. They claim that this work isn't related to farm labor. We pay both locals and nationals in our kitchen a \$1 an hour, which is the minimum wage required by law.



The Department of Labor is consistently giving us a bad time, which naturally figures. The department is under the control of the unions, who are always cracking the whip over them to put in more and more stringent regulations. Some of them are darn right silly, for example: they came out with housing regulations which said that there had to be so many candle power of light all throughout the barracks. So, we went to a great deal of expense to put in reflectors and more powerful bulbs and we lowered the fixtures, etc. and what was the result? The men came to us and complained that there was too much light and it was hurting their eyes. The unions have been sniping away at us ever since this program started and it is purely destructive criticism. The unions have nothing better to offer, they can't possibly fill the need for farm labor. If you took away the bracero program, the agriculture of this country would collapse overnight. It is a funny thing that the unions should get so hot and bothered about our use of Mexican-Nationals since the whole history of the agricultural Southwest shows that we have always relied on foreign labor. For over 100 years solid, we have had to have foreign labor of one type or another. It began with the Indians and then the Chinese and Japanese and Filipinos and so on down the line; and I hope you'll excuse me if I include the "oakies" of the 1930's as being foreign labor.

You ask what I see coming up in the future regarding the use of foreign labor. Well, I don't expect that ~~we~~ we'll be using too much of the Japanese under the new program, because the Department of Labor is dead set against it. I was at a conference on farm labor back in Philadelphia last winter and one of the big guns from the Department of Labor was there and he ~~raked~~ raked the Japanese program up and down. The main reason being that, he said, "it was a program between a government and an employer rather than between two governments." Actually the reason I suspect is that the program is administered by the Department of Justice rather than by the Department of Labor. Naturally as far as we are concerned we would like to see all these



programs under the Department of Agriculture which is where we feel they belong. As far as the future of the bracero program is concerned, these men will continue coming for many years, I dare say. Although eventually I fully expect that they will all be able to make a comparable living in Mexico. Industry in Mexico is booming. When I was down in Chihuahua recently, I saw a new multi-million dollar paper mill and a number of brand new steel mills and foundaries and the like. Some are the result of foreign investment and some by the investment of Mexicans. But these industries are going to be attracting the agricultural workers since they will pay decent wages and the result of that is that the farmers of Mexico are going to have to start paying their workers better wages. There will be no more of this 2--3--4 pesos a day stuff. Well, when all this takes place the U.S. isn't going to appear quite so attractive and I think it's just as well, I want to see the economy of Mexico develop, because as I see it; all of us Canada, the U.S. and Mexico are in this thing together. When you come right down to it, I think maybe it's unfortunate that some of the best men, some of the sharpest fellows in Mexico; even though they may not have had much formal education, are coming up here as braceros year after year. If they stayed in Mexico they could help along this trend toward economic development a great deal.

You ask about our association policies. We pay a minimum wage of 85¢ an hour, although most of the men are able to make more than that. Actually the way we figure it is this; we take the top three-fourths of the crew and figure up their earnings for the day or for the week and if they don't average 85¢ an hour, then we adjust the rate per box so that they are able to average this much. Say we're paying 16¢ a box for oranges, we may raise the rate to 18¢. We don't take the full crew average, because there are always some goof-offs who aren't really trying. The Department of Labor, however, is after us to take the full crew average and I suppose that one of these days we'll have to change to that basis.



When our camp is operating at capacity we have 784 men in here. From January until June this year, we were right at that number, we were going full blast. Next year I am thinking of putting in some more toilets and showers and washing facilities; and then I will be able to handle 1200 men in this camp. We already have enough barracks for them. At the present ~~time~~ time we're in a slack season, we have only 311 men and next month we will have even fewer. In September we'll begin to pick up again. We operate here the way they do at the San Antonio Camp, we give six weeks contracts only, so that we can get rid of the men who don't work out well. Those we like we keep extending as long as we can use them up to eighteen months. After that they are required to go home. The Mexican government likes them to get reacquainted with their families and to raise the birth rate of Mexico. The Mexican government prefers that they wait about three months before trying to come in for another eighteen months, however, on a number of occasions we have taken them down to El Centro and had them back here within three days under a special arrangement which we were able to work out with the authorities. Those that ~~we~~ we are sending down to the border at the present time will do one of a number of things: some will be able to get new contracts from other associations at the Reception Center; many of them undoubtedly want to go home on furlough, this will be a good time of year for them to help harvest the crops on their farms and so forth. Some of our men we will send up to the San Joaquin Valley to growers who are associate members of ours. ~~up~~ there. I will say one thing, that practically everyone of the men who have been in this camp would like to come back.

Do any of our men marry local girls? (Laughs) "Too many." One is too many. They get married and tell us ~~about~~ about it later and this causes us all kinds of trouble; as to whether they will live in camp or in town; as to whether we'll help them get a visa and so forth and so on.



We had one case here not long ago, where one of our boys got mixed up with a local girl who ~~was~~ was older than he was. He got her pregnant and they weren't married. He came to us to bail him out. We went in with the boy to talk with the girl's family. Her father was burning up with rage, we had to practically restrain him physically; he swore he was going "to keel him", well we finally got it straightened out with the help of the local priest, we had the wedding right here in camp and later we were able to bring the man in under a visa. As far as I know he and his wife are living in Cucamong at the present time and are getting along okay.

Do the men send money home regularly? Yes, our weekly payroll is between 40 and \$50,000, incidentally we pay here every week rather than every two weeks. I couldn't tell you right off hand how much of this gets sent back to Mexico, but it is a healthy chunk. I would estimate that 30% of the men send money home each week. But, it is a rotating 30%. What they'll do is borrow money from their compañeros so that they can send a bit more home and the next time their buddies are ready to send money home, they'll repay the money; so it works out that 30% send money and borrow from another 30%. Meaning that in effect about 60% of the men are sending something each week. We get bank drafts from the Bank of America payable at the Bank of Commerce in Mexico and we provide these bank drafts to the men right here in camp so that they don't have to pay anybody anything extra in order to send their money home.

You say that you are particularly interested in evidence of the influence of this program on development in Mexico. I can give you all sorts of evidence. For example, we had a man here ~~recently~~ recently who wanted to put in an irrigation system on his farm in Mexico. He went to my son, who helps me here at the camp, and asked for advice. Well, my boy talked over with him the various kinds of irrigations and helped him make some estimates of costs which involved a lot of conversion from the metric system to feet and yards; and the upshot of it was that the man decided to buy Rainberg



Sprinklers, and he presently has those installed on his place and is making a good thing of it. I would estimate that 60% of all the braceros who come to the U.S. do very well, the rest may not quite meet their expectations for one reason or another. You ask about health particularly. Our doctor who comes in every afternoon may see as many as fifty men a day. That would be at the time of year when the weather changes and the men are catching colds and things like that. We have a dispensary here and an infirmary with eight beds, we can put in even more if necessary. The night-watchman is instructed to take care of the men if they turn up sick at night time. We don't have much serious illness. We just recently had a fellow turn up with amoebic dysentary, but so far as I know this is only the second case that they have had in the whole history of the camp. Every once in awhile we'll have somebody hurt on the job. You may have noticed the fellow with a bandage on the side of his head; he was up at the top of his ladder picking lemons and thought that he could reach just one more before he had to move the ladder, and he lost his balance and fell and almost ripped his ear off. Lemon trees have big ~~thorn~~ thorns on them as you may know. We also have automobile accidents from time to time. For example, last fall there was a very serious wreck out here on the freeway. One of our men was riding with a local Mexican. They were both drunk and got over on the wrong side of the freeway. They hit another car head-on and a couple of people were killed. The bracero himself was badly injured and has been in the hospital ever since. He used up his insurance benefits provided by the non-occupation policy. It must have cost the insurance company \$5,000 all together and he still needed further hospital care. So, all we could do was ship him down to the hospital in Mexicali and he is still there.

This brings up a subject which I have often thought about, namely, that there should be a welfare fund that the men would contribute to which could be drawn on in an overwhelming case such as this. I have discussed



it with the local Consul and he seems to think it is a good idea. But there are many other people who would have to give their approval before anything of the sort could be put into effect. For all I know, it's against the insurance laws of California. What I had in mind is a fund to which they would kick in maybe 50¢ each payday. A sort of mutual aid fund. If the program were abolished the money that was left in the fund could be turned over ~~the~~ to the Mexican government.

The priest from Cucamong, Father Valdez, comes in here every Sunday morning for Mass. We have a chapel at one end of the mess-hall. If you go in there during meal times you will see many of the men kneeling down and saying prayers as they come in or go out. I would estimate that at least 75% of all the men in the camp attend Mass on Sunday mornings. Maybe ~~x~~ it runs as high as 90%.

To return for a moment to the way our association operates. We have regular members, some of whom are individual growers and some of whom are associations of growers. These members are assessed on a pro-rated basis to provide for the expenses of transporting the men, keeping up the camps, etc. Let us say that you were a small grower who suddenly found you were no longer able to do your own work and you came to us and asked us for some nationals. The first thing we would tell you would be to go to the employment office in Ontario and try to get local help. If you couldn't get local help, you would ask them to certify you to receive national help. After that cleared you could come back to us and we would give you men if they were available. Being a small grower you might not want to become a regular member, so we would make you what we call an associate member. You would be expected to put up a deposit amounting to approximately two weeks wages for the men you were given. At the end of the time you would be given back all but \$20 of this. You would also be required to pay 10¢ per man hour to help defray the expenses of the association.



I don't think I'm just bragging when I say we have the best camp in California, maybe the whole country. I am not talking now about the mere facilities, because I have seen some of these brand new camps they have built in Goleta and other places which ~~xxxx~~ we can't compete with; but in terms of social conditions and in terms of morale. I don't think you can beat us. The Consul, Señor Dominguez, was out here on the 5th of May and he stood up on the platform you see in the center of camp and he said in his speech: "You have the best camp right here, you men are treated the best of any I have ever seen." I honestly believe this is true. You see, I get out among these men and I talk to them and I get to know them. When the time comes for them to be repatriated, I really hate to see them go. Some of them are almost like sons to me. There was one fellow we had here for a long time whose father had died when he was little and when people asked him, "what does your father do?", he would say, "My father is Señor Orton."



Speaking of relations with the local girls. We had one man working here in our kitchen for sometime. He was a good man, an intelligent man, a good worker; but he got involved with a girl in San Bernardino. Our kitchen help begins work at two o'clock in the morning and this young

was getting back from visiting his girl just about in time to get to work in the morning. And needless to say he was getting run down at both ends of the line. What we did was take him out of the kitchen and put him to work out in the orchards where the work is a little bit harder. After a full day of picking lemons, he found that he just didn't have as much pep as he used to. We got him straightened out in this way.

Our camp staff consists of myself, my son, Mr. Iselas, four girls who work in the office, four or five men working full time on camp maintenance, plumbing, carpentry and so forth; and fifteen to twenty-five men working in the kitchen, depending on the number of men we have in the camp. A number of these people are former braceros whom we have vouched for and helped to come in under visas. For example, the head of our maintenance crew, Mr. Salinas, and one of his daughters, incidentally is working for us in the office; Mr. Iselas, is a former bracero; Mr. Romo, and one or two others.

They have tried some types of foreign labor here in California which didn't work out well at all. For example, I understand they brought in a few big, black niggers from Jamaica in the British West Indies. These guys talk with ~~an~~ Oxford accents, the funniest thing you ever saw. They didn't work worth a nickel. I understand, however, that they are now bringing fairly large numbers of them into Florida. Also, here in California, for a brief time, I understand some of the growers tried bringing in Puerto Ricans.



They are dynamite. They are actually citizens of the U.S. and therefore, they could go off, skipping off from their contracts and raising merry hell and there wasn't much of anything that the growers could do about it.

If the bracero program were abolished tomorrow for some strange reason or other; I can give you a general idea of what might happen. Because our association had no braceros for a few months in 1952, during that period of time we lost \$150,000 in Valencia oranges before we were able to get straightened out. I just don't know what we would do without the Mexican-Nationals. I do know one thing, if they weren't here you wouldn't be eating much green stuff and ~~you~~ you wouldn't be drinking so much orange juice.

We very, very rarely get a college or university student coming up here as a bracero. Maybe once in a great while somebody from the University of Mexico, who is doing a special study, will come up for that purpose. For example, not too long ago there was an agricultural student at the University who wanted to come up to study certain types of fertilizing techniques and he apparently wasn't able to swing it under the foreign student program; so he wanted to come up as a bracero. We were perfectly willing to co-operate and we had ~~x~~ it all arranged, but for some reason or other he never showed up.

It is only natural that if a man comes up here with venereal disease or contacts it while he is here, he maybe a little reluctant to go to the doctor and admit that he has it. But, we usually find out about it anyway,



because, usually a man will discuss with one of his friends in the barracks. He will try to find out what he can do to cure it and this man will ask for the ideas of some other man and so it spreads, until eventually word gets to the management,. All we do in most cases is see that he gets the proper amount of penicillin to fix him ~~hi~~ up. But if anybody in the kitchen shows up with V.D., I can tell you that he is out of here right now. We have had a few cases like this.

We figure on an average of 15 tortillas per man per day. When the camp is full we are turning out 12,00 per day. We have a man working full time on this. Our tortilla machine makes something like 42 per minute. We make both corn and wheat type. It appears that the ~~nort~~añeros, the men from northern Mexico tend to prefer the wheat tortilla, and the men from southern Mexico seem to prefer the corn type.

When you talk about the standard of living in Mexico you have got to remember that it varies rather widely from place to place. I think ~~that~~ there are important differences between the different states. And one thing I know for an absolute fact, is that the standard of living or at least the cost of living is very much higher in the big cities than it is in the rural areas. In Mexico City, for example, you will find it very much the same as it is in the U.S. Guadalajara and other big cities may not be quite so bad but they are still a great deal more expensive than the rural areas. In the rural areas the reason that a man is able to get by on maybe 30¢ a day is, because he is usually raising his own corn and beans and squash, and so forth.; or else he has a neighbor who is raising them and who is willing to let him have them for practically nothing.